

PROTECTIVE GAPS FOR THOSE IN PRECARIOUS WORK: TRENDS AND CONSEQUENCES

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ABSTRACT

There is widespread concern in Europe about the rise of precarious forms of employment and what can be done to foster inclusiveness. We define precarious work as involving variable or less than full-time hours, temporary or fixed term employment, bogus self employment and forms of full-time employment used to reduce labour costs- such as outsourcing based on low wages, posted workers etc.. The extent to which these forms of work give rise to precariousness depends on both the levels of employment and social protection available for 'standard' employment and on the extent of gaps in access to this protection for workers in non standard forms of employment, as described.

Precarious work is a cause for concern first because of its impact on the individual workers by denying them access to employment rights and social protection that have been established on assumption of continuous employment under standard employment relationships. These gaps in employment and social protection rights can take many forms and have different consequences according to the personal circumstances of the employee (for example whether they have access to derived rights via the family) and according to type of employment form or degree of precarity. Precarious work also however impacts on standards or norms in the employment system and on the viability of the social protection system. That is precarious work can be considered as part of a process of decommmodifying employment and undermining the standard employment relationship and in the process passing on more of the costs of social reproduction to individuals, families but also onto the social welfare system. There is therefore a risk of both tensions and contradictions between employment policies aimed at flexibility on the one hand and social protection policies aimed at reducing overall public expenditure costs on the other hand. This paper draws on a six country study of precarious work to map these gaps in employment and social protection according to forms of precarious work, to assess current policy trends, and consider the impact on both the standard employment relationship and the evolving systems of social



welfare. The paper reveals the tensions and contradictions in the evolving systems of employment and social protection.

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